

When Love Confronts: Balancing Grace and Truth in Church Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:1–13 (ESV)

Student Devotional

This 5-day devotional will help you explore how genuine love within the church sometimes means confronting sin head-on. Each day, you'll see how Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 5 calls us to a holy standard rooted in both compassion and truth. As you read, ask God to shape your heart for the good of others and the glory of Christ.

Day 1: When Sin Goes Unchecked

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you... And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning...?" (1 Corinthians 5:1–2, ESV)

Think About It

Imagine discovering a dangerous leak in the roof of your house. Ignoring it might feel easier in the moment—no awkward repairs or big expenses—but neglecting it allows the damage to spread. That's what was happening in Corinth: obvious sin was being overlooked for the sake of "peace," and the church was acting like nothing was wrong. Paul calls them out, telling them they should be grieving instead of bragging. Real unity and love aren't defined by pretending everything is fine; they involve dealing with problems that threaten the health of the whole community. If your church or friend group faced a serious moral issue, would you be willing to address it, or would you dodge the discomfort?

Pray It

Lord, help me see sin—not as an awkward topic to avoid—but as something that truly harms my relationships and the church. Give me a heart that mourns over wrongdoing and desires genuine restoration.

Do It

Think about a small "leak" in your own life—an ongoing sin or compromise you've been ignoring. Write it down or tell a trusted friend. Commit to praying about this every day this week, asking God to show you the first steps toward change or accountability.

Day 2: Confronting with Compassion

“... hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved...” (1 Corinthians 5:5, ESV)

Think About It

At first glance, Paul’s instruction to “hand [the man] over to Satan” sounds harsh. But look closely at his motive: “so that his spirit may be saved.” The goal isn’t punishment—it’s redemption. Sometimes, a drastic step is needed to shake us free from our illusions and bring us back to God. Think of a surgeon removing a cancerous tumor: the cut is painful, but it’s done out of care for the patient’s life. In the same way, biblical church discipline is meant to wake us up to our need for repentance. It’s never about “kicking someone out” for the sake of pride or cruelty; it’s about leading them to truly grapple with the seriousness of their sin and, hopefully, to return to Christ.

Pray It

Father, give me a heart that longs for restoration—even when strong measures are needed. Keep me from being judgmental or harsh. Help me remember that confronting sin is an act of love with a goal of repentance and healing.

Do It

Reflect on a time you experienced or witnessed a “wake-up call” in your own life—a tough consequence that eventually led you or someone else to change for the better. Ask God to help you see church discipline in a similar redemptive light, and, if appropriate, share that testimony with someone needing hope.

Day 3: Cleaning Out the Leaven

“Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ... For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1 Corinthians 5:6–7, ESV)

Think About It

Think of yeast in bread: just a bit works through all the dough, changing its entire texture and taste. Paul uses this analogy to warn that even “small” sins, if applauded or left unchecked, can influence an entire church. Gossip might spread mistrust; unchecked greed can normalize materialism; moral compromise in one person can become the “new

July 27 – **August 3, 2025**

normal” for everyone else. Yet Paul also anchors his warning in the gospel: “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” Because of Jesus’ death, we’ve been set apart and cleansed, and we’re called to live out that holy identity. Cleaning out spiritual “yeast” isn’t about being legalistic; it’s about honoring the sacrifice that saved us and protecting the environment where faith can flourish.

Pray It

Jesus, thank You for being the Passover Lamb who set me free. Teach me to see even “small” sins as roadblocks to true freedom. Show me how to honor Your sacrifice by guarding the purity of my heart and my community.

Do It

Identify one subtle negative influence you see gaining ground in your church, family, or friend group—could be an unhealthy trend, a toxic attitude, or an offhand sin that’s becoming “normal.” Pray about how you can address it kindly but firmly, whether by speaking up or modeling a different way.

Day 4: Guarding the Church’s Heart

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people... not at all meaning the people of this world... But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral...”
(1 Corinthians 5:9–11, ESV)

Think About It

Paul clarifies a major misunderstanding: He isn’t telling Christians to avoid non-believers altogether. In fact, we’re called to engage the lost with the gospel. The problem arises when a believer openly, willfully practices sin while claiming the name of Christ. If we ignore that contradiction, we risk damaging the church’s witness and enabling harmful behavior to continue unchecked. This is about drawing a boundary to protect the community’s spiritual health and also to show the unrepentant individual the seriousness of their actions. It may feel uncomfortable or unkind, but sometimes love means closing the door on toxic patterns until true repentance can happen.

Pray It

July 27 – **August 3, 2025**

Lord, help me understand the difference between reaching out to the lost and rightly challenging those who say they follow You but live in persistent rebellion. Give me wisdom to protect the church's heart without turning away from those who truly need Your grace.

Do It

Consider how you interact with friends who profess faith but are openly dismissing God's commands. Pray for discernment: How might you balance maintaining a warm relationship (showing them love) with a firm stance that you can't endorse or enable ongoing sin?

Day 5: A Vision for Restoration

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ... ‘Expel the wicked person from among you.’” (1 Corinthians 5:12–13, ESV)

Think About It

The idea of “expelling” someone seems harsh, but throughout this chapter, Paul's main goal is to rescue the sinner and preserve the church. We see hints of this later in 2 Corinthians, where a disciplined brother is encouraged to rejoin the fellowship after showing remorse. Effective church discipline aims for restoration, not permanent exclusion. This underscores a vital truth: our community's call to holiness is rooted in the mission of the gospel—to save, heal, and bring people back into right relationship with God. So while we don't tolerate harmful sin that endangers the church, we also never close the door on genuine repentance. Holiness and love walk hand in hand.

Pray It

Father, thank You for reminding me that discipline within Your church should always point toward restoration. Keep my heart tender and ready to forgive when someone genuinely turns back to You. Let our church be a place of both holiness and healing.

Do It

Think of someone you know who's struggled with sin but has shown signs of sincere repentance. Could you encourage them with a text, call, or note? Sometimes a simple “I see God at work in you, and I'm thankful for your growth” can help them feel accepted and motivated to keep moving forward in Christ.

You're Ready for Class!

Over these five days, you've explored how true love sometimes confronts sin for the sake of the sinner's soul and the church's health. **1 Corinthians 5** reminds us that ignoring wrongdoing isn't kindness—it's indifference. Genuine compassion balances grace and truth, setting boundaries when necessary but always longing for restoration. Come to class ready to share what you've learned and how these passages challenge you to uphold both **holiness** and **hope** within the body of Christ.

Before We Gather

- What are some reasons modern believers might hesitate to address sin within the church, and how does our culture's definition of "tolerance" affect our view of correction?
- Recall a situation—maybe in your church experience—where blatant wrongdoing was overlooked for the sake of "keeping peace." How might serious confrontation have led to a healthier outcome for everyone involved?
- Think about a time when you or someone you know faced consequences that initially felt harsh but ultimately led to growth or repentance. How can church discipline function similarly for a person living in unrepentant sin?
- What are some modern "leavens" (sinful habits or cultural influences) that might quickly spread within a church if not addressed, and why is it crucial to confront them early?
- How might a church strike the balance between loving outreach to unbelievers and necessary discipline for those who profess Christ yet live in persistent sin?